

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
August 22 - 28, 2013

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1. [Hagel: U.S. Continues to Work with Other Nations on Syria](#) (08-27-2013)

By Cheryl Pellerin
American Forces Press Service

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Brunei, Aug. 27, 2013 – While traveling in Southeast Asia today, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel spoke by phone with British Defense Secretary Philip Hammond and French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian about chemical attacks that have killed innocent civilians in Syria.

In a summary of the conversations, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little said Hagel conveyed that the United States is committed to working with the international community to respond to the “outrageous” attacks.

The secretary condemned the violence carried out by the Syrian regime and said the United States military is prepared for any contingency involving Syria, Little said, adding that Hagel pledged to continue close coordination with the British and French defense forces.

“Syria used chemical weapons against its own people,” Hagel said during an interview here this afternoon with Jon Sopel of “BBC World News.”

“Now, we’ll have more information and more intelligence here very shortly to present,” the secretary said.

Most U.S. allies, most U.S. partners and most of the international community have little doubt that the most basic international humanitarian standard was violated by the Syrian regime in using chemical weapons against its own people, Hagel said.

“The deeper we get into this, it seems to me it's clearer and clearer that the government of Syria was responsible,” he added. “But we'll wait and determine what the intelligence and the facts bear out.”

The secretary said President Barack Obama has asked the Defense Department for options for all contingencies, and the department has complied.

“We have done that,” Hagel said. “He has seen them, we are prepared, and we have moved assets in place to be able to fulfill and comply with whatever option the president wishes to take. We are ready to go.”

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2. Global Norms Demand Response to Chemical Weapons Use (08-27-2013)

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States has a national security stake in defending international prohibitions on the use of chemical weapons. Syria’s apparent “flagrant violation” of that standard demands a response, according to White House spokesman Jay Carney.

President Obama is now engaged in deciding what that response will be in ongoing consultations with international partners and leaders of the U.S. Congress. “There will be a response,” Carney said at a White House briefing August 27, expressing the administration’s conviction that a chemical weapons attack did occur in neighborhoods around Damascus August 21.

Carney said the administration is certain that the Syrian government has chemical weapons, has maintained their security through the conflict and has the capability to deliver them.

“The opposition does not,” Carney said. “Suggestions that there is any doubt about who is responsible for this are as preposterous as suggestions that the attack itself didn’t occur,” Carney said.

While the president continues to weigh the possible options, including military options, Carney made clear that the objective of any action would not be a regime change. Any U.S. response will be about upholding the agreement of 189 nations, “representing 98 percent of the world’s people,” that chemical weapons use is a violation of international law.

Carney repeated the longstanding U.S. position that the two-year-old conflict in Syria must be resolved with a political solution, one that does not include President Bashar al-Assad in power.

The spokesman also said it is not expected that the United States would respond with a deployment of ground troops into the region.

President Obama had conversations August 27 on a response to the chemical attacks with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President François Hollande and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

The State Department announced over the last several days that Secretary of State John Kerry has been involved in far-reaching consultations with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton and Arab League Secretary General Nabil Elaraby. In the days since the attack, Kerry has also spoken to counterparts in the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Germany, Russia, Jordan, Qatar, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Italy, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons — known in the abbreviated form of CWC — is an almost 20-year-old agreement to which 189 nations have agreed. Syria is not one of them.

The CWC is devoted to the elimination of the entire category of chemical weapons by prohibiting the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer or use of chemical weapons by the nations who are party to the treaty. All member states have agreed to enforce the treaty in their jurisdictions, destroy any weapons in their arsenals and destroy the facilities that produced them.

Related Links:

[Kerry Calls for Accountability on Syrian Chemical Attack](#) (08-26-2013)

[Kerry on Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria](#) (08-26-2013)

[White House Meeting on Reports of Chemical Weapons Use in Syria](#) (08-25-2013)

[Hagel: Defense Department Has Options for Obama on Syria](#) (08-23-213)

3. Vigilant Eagle Continues Closer U.S.-Russian Cooperation (08-26-2013)

By Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 26, 2013 – Beginning tomorrow, fighter jets from the North American Aerospace Defense Command and the Russian air force will scramble to track and intercept “hijacked” aircraft during an air defense exercise viewed as a steppingstone toward closer military-to-military cooperation in additional areas.

Vigilant Eagle 13 kicked off today, with scenarios that present the United States, Canada and Russia with a common enemy: terrorist hijackers, Joseph Bonnet, director of joint training and exercises for NORAD and U.S. Northern Command, said during a telephone interview with American Forces Press Service.

The exercise is the fifth in a series, based on a 2003 agreement between the sitting U.S. and Russian presidents to strengthen the two militaries’ relationship and their ability to work together. The threat of international hijackers served as a foundation to help advance that effort, resulting in an exercise program that addresses a recognized threat, Bonnet explained.

Vigilant Eagle began in 2008 as a command post exercise. At Russia’s request, it now alternates between CPXs that test out principles and procedures in a computer-based setting and “live-fly” exercises that apply those principles and procedures the following year.

This year’s exercise is the third in the series to incorporate actual aircraft, Bonnet reported. A Russian Tupolev and a commercial aircraft contracted by the United States will simulate

commercial airliners seized by terrorists. The U.S. Air Force's Airborne Warning and Control System and Russia's A-50 Beriev will serve as command-and-control platforms.

Live fighter jets -- Canadian CF-18 Hornets and Russian Sukhois -- will track, identify, intercept and follow the hijacked aircraft, and both Canada and Russia will conduct air-to-air refueling operations. The Canadian air force has been integral to past Vigilant Eagle exercises, but is contributing aircraft for the first time this year, Bonnet said.

In addition, the Federal Aviation Administration and its Russian equivalent are participating.

The scenario involves two "hijacked" commercial aircraft that challenge participants on the ground and in the sky to provide a coordinated response, Bonnet explained. The first flight, to originate tomorrow from Anchorage, Alaska, will travel into Russian airspace. The following day, a Russian aircraft will take off from Anadyr, Russia, toward U.S. airspace.

When the aircraft fail to respond to communications, NORAD, the U.S.-Canada command that safeguards U.S. skies under Operation Noble Eagle, and the Russian air force will move into action. Both will launch or divert fighter jets to investigate and follow the suspect aircraft headed toward each other's airspace. At that point, they will hand off the missions to each other to complete.

Working together in Anchorage and Anadyr and at the NORAD headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colo., participants will cooperate in escort and handoff procedures using two distinct communications, command-and-control and air traffic control systems, Bonnet said.

Vigilant Eagle has become more ambitious and valuable with each iteration, Bonnet said, noting that this year's exercise will be no different.

"This is the culmination of everything that has gone on in previous exercises, and we expect it to continue to mature," he said. "Like us, the Russian Federation air force is eager to expand the scope and complexity of the exercise, and to look into other areas," such as related search-and-rescue and airfield operations.

Bonnet called continuation of Vigilant Eagle, particularly at a time when budget costs have caused the cancellation of many other exercises, a success in itself. With fewer than 100 people directly involved from the United States, Vigilant Eagle offers tremendous "bang for the buck," he said.

"This is a small, relatively inexpensive exercise with a huge payoff," he said. "It doesn't cost any of the countries a lot of money, but it is building things that have immediate value for all of them. When you have procedures and a means of communicating information between both sides, that has a lot of value."

Another big success, Bonnet said, is that the exercise has transcended leadership changes both in the United States and in Russia, as well as recent political tensions between them.

Both countries recognize the importance of continued cooperation to keep their international borders safe, he said.

"It is one of the biggest single areas where the Russian Federation, U.S. and Canada can truly cooperate," he said. "All three countries share a common objective in thwarting, combating and cooperating against terrorism."

As their militaries work together to confront terrorist hijackers, Bonnet said, they are laying the foundation for future cooperation in other areas.

“What we are trying to do is continually build and expand the exercise and use this as a basis for moving the relationship forward,” he said. “That, to me, is the biggest value of Vigilant Eagle.”

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4. Hagel: Defense Department Has Options for Obama on Syria (08-23-2013)

By Cheryl Pellerin

American Forces Press Service

ABOARD A MILITARY AIRCRAFT, Aug. 23, 2013 – Shortly after takeoff on the first leg of his second official trip to the Asia-Pacific region, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel joined a video teleconference with President Barack Obama’s senior national security advisors that focused on the deadly situation in Syria.

In the latest tragedy in the stricken nation, more than 1,000 men, women and children died in what may have been a chemical weapons attack on its own citizens by the government of President Bashar Assad. The United Nations and others are investigating the attacks.

After leaving Hawaii, the first stop on his trip, Hagel spoke today with reporters who are traveling with him to Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines.

“The president has asked the Defense Department for options. {As always, the department is prepared, has been prepared, to provide ranges for all contingencies for the president of the United States, and we’ll continue to do that,” Hagel said.

“We’re dealing with a very serious issue,” the secretary added. “We are working with our international partners, the international community and the United Nations. We are looking at every option.”

Referring to an interview that Obama gave Chris Cuomo on CNN about Syria, Hagel said the president framed the situation there “exactly right” when he said the United States must be part of the international community in its response to the actions in Syria.

As the president noted, the secretary said, the United States must consider its long-term objectives, its long-term interests, and its objectives for influence and outcomes in deciding upon any response.

“The Defense Department has a responsibility to provide the president with options for all contingencies, and that requires positioning our forces and positioning our assets to be able to carry out whatever options the president might choose,” Hagel said.

“On the specific option of military use or force in response to what we will determine at some point here very shortly what did happen, and we’re still assessing that,” he added. “I think the range of military options is always part of the range of options the president has.”

Hagel said he thinks the international community is moving quickly to get the facts and the intelligence right about what happened in Syria so a decision can be made swiftly about how to respond.

“If, in fact, this was a deliberate use and attack by the Syrian government on its own people using chemical weapons, there may be another attack coming,” he said. “A very quick assessment of what happened and whatever appropriate response should be made.”

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[Chuck Hagel](#)

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[Growing Engagement, Cooperation Mark Hagel's Second Asia Visit](#)

[5. Growing Engagement, Cooperation Mark Hagel's Second Asia Visit \(08-23-2013\)](#)

By Cheryl Pellerin

American Forces Press Service

HONOLULU, Aug. 23, 2013 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel arrived here yesterday on the first leg of a trip to the Asia-Pacific region to meet with counterparts and leaders from several countries, and to attend a defense ministers meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN.

This is the secretary's second trip to the region since June.

Before visiting Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines in the days ahead, Hagel stopped at Marine Corps Base Hawaii-Kaneohe Bay here to thank 200 Marines and sailors for their service to the nation and to honor their part in President Barack Obama's strategic U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region.

“This rebalance is not only about our security interests in this area, it's about a partnership of prosperity for this region of the world -- over 6 billion global citizens today,” the secretary said.

Threats that confront the world today are not unique to a region, a country, a religion or an ethnic group, he added. The threats are universal and they make alliances even more important than they have been in the past.

“You are all part of it,” Hagel told the Marines and sailors. “You are at the front end, ... the cutting edge, ... and what you do and how you do it is particularly important as to how the world sees America and how they view our ... intentions.”

On Aug. 25 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, a senior defense official said, Hagel will meet with his recently appointed counterpart, Defense Minister Hishammuddin Tun Hussein. Hagel first met with Hishammuddin in June at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. During the meeting, both

leaders emphasized the importance of working bilaterally and multilaterally toward greater stability in Southeast Asia. They also discussed cyber issues and transnational threats.

“Malaysia-U.S. defense ties have dramatically improved over the last several years,” the defense official said. “We’re doing a lot more cooperative activity, and we’re doing a lot more together. This is an opportunity for them to really touch base on the bilateral defense relationship and see where we’re headed in the years ahead.”

Hagel also will meet with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak to discuss overall defense relations and regional issues, including Hagel’s recent consultations with Chinese Defense Minister Gen. Chang Wanquan, “which I think will be of great interest throughout the region,” the defense official said.

Later in the week, in Jakarta, Indonesia, Hagel will meet with his Defense Minister Purnomo Yusgiantoro, whom the secretary also met with during the Shangri-La Dialogue. There, they reaffirmed the importance of deepening ties in support of the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership, an initiative of Presidents Barack Obama and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono calling for closer ties between the two governments and societies.

In Singapore, the defense leaders also reviewed progress made in recent years to increase exercises, training and regular defense policy dialogues.

“With Indonesia, we also have a significant increase in defense cooperation over the last several years,” the senior defense official said.

From Sept. 5 to Sept. 13, the United States and Indonesia will co-chair a counterterrorism ground exercise agreed upon by the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting plus eight countries, or ADMM Plus, the defense official said.

ASEAN was formed in 1967. Its 10 member states are Burma, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Defense ministers from these nations are attendees of the annual ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting, or ADMM. The ADMM-Plus is made up of the 10 ASEAN members and its eight dialogue partners: the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, New Zealand and Russia.

In Jakarta, Hagel will meet with Yudhoyono, a respected leader with great influence in the region, the defense official said. “He’s entering his last year in office,” the official added, “so it’s a nice opportunity to thank Indonesia for a lot of tremendous cooperation over the last several years.”

The ADMM Plus meeting begins Aug. 28 in Brunei. This is only the second time the full 18-member ADMM Plus ministerial meeting will be held, and another senior defense official said it’s important for the United States to be there for two reasons.

The first, he said, the forum is proving to be extremely action focused.

“The ADMM countries have three multilateral exercises this year, and one of our focuses in the rebalance to Asia is shifting from a history of almost all bilateral engagements to do more multilateral engagements, to do more with groups of countries to meet common challenges,” he said. “ADMM is giving us a very good way to do that.”

Brunei recently hosted a major humanitarian assistance-disaster response-military medicine exercise that included all 18 of the countries that will be at the ADMM Plus meeting, the official said, and will involve more than 3,000 personnel.

“We see those as part of the wave of the future -- how common challenges are going to be handled in this region,” he explained. “So being at ADMM is an opportunity to continue focusing with this group of countries on doing those kinds of action-oriented activities on the defense side.”

The second reason, the official said, is that ADMM offers a good opportunity to engage with partners all in one place.

“The secretary will be able to have bilateral engagements ... and he’ll also see a few other of his ministerial counterparts for short side meetings,” the official said.

After the ADMM Plus meeting, the secretary’s final stop will be Manila in the Philippines.

There, Hagel will talk with President Benigno S. Aquino III, Defense Minister Voltaire Gazmin and Foreign Secretary Albert F. del Rosario about ongoing negotiations for a framework agreement that would allow U.S. forces to operate on Philippine military bases and in Philippine territory and waters to help build Philippine armed forces capacity in maritime security and maritime domain awareness.

“The negotiations just got underway a week ago and will be ongoing for some time,” the defense official said.

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[U.S. Military Will Remain Strong Despite Budget Cuts, Hagel Tells Hawaii Marines](#) (08-22-2013)

[Hagel Slates Trip to Southeast Asia](#) (08-19-2013)

6. U.S. Military Will Remain Strong Despite Budget Cuts, Hagel Tells Hawaii Marines (08-22-2013)

By Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 22, 2013 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel assured Marines in Hawaii today that despite deep budget and force cuts, the U.S. military will remain the world’s best, and the nation will honor the commitments it has made to them.

Hagel kicked off a four-nation trip to Southeast Asia with a troop talk at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay.

The secretary said the Marines are integral to the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, and he recognized the pivotal role they play in strengthening alliances and partnerships across the region.

“You are at the cutting edge of security, of stability and prosperity,” he told the assembled group. “You are all a part of it, at the front end of it, the cutting edge of it. And what you do and how you do it is particularly important as to how the world sees America and how they view our interests, but probably more importantly, how they view our intentions.”

When the secretary opened the floor to questions, every Marine questioner asked about the impact of budget reductions and sequestration on military readiness and credibility and retirement and educational benefits.

Hagel said he and other Defense Department leaders have been honest and direct with Congress and the American people about the national security implications of large budget cuts.

He expressed concern about the size of the budget and force reductions and uncertainty about future funding levels. These factors, and the speed with which cuts are taking place, give the DOD leaders “very little flexibility in the tough decisions that are going to have to be made,” he said.

Even with these challenges, the secretary emphasized that the U.S. military remains the world’s best.

“Even with these cuts – and they are severe, and they may be even more severe – there is no question that America has the most significant military capability in the world,” he assured the Marines.

“There is no military even close to this military,” he said, a point he said the United States has made its friends, allies and adversaries alike.

“We are not without resources. We are not without capability,” Hagel said. “You can measure that by any metric,” most notably by the men and women in uniform.

“You are the best-trained, the smartest, the best-led, most professional military force this country has ever had,” Hagel told the group. He lauded the noncommissioned officer corps that he said stands head and shoulders above all others. “No other armed force in the world, no one is even close to having an enlisted NCO corps like we have in our institution,” he said.

The secretary also noted the U.S. military’s technological superiority and a budget, that even with deep reductions, remains sizeable.

“When you look at the balance sheet here, we are going to be the best, most capable, strongest military force in the world for a long time to come,” he said.

Strategic choices being made today will help ensure that continues into the future, Hagel said.

“I think this is going to make you stronger,” he said, expressing confidence in America’s people, its values and its military. “We will come out of this stronger than we went in,” he said.

Asked about the future of military retirement benefits, Hagel acknowledged that the current path is fiscally unsustainable for the long term.

“That doesn’t mean we are going to cut off retirement benefits,” he made clear. “For all of you, when you retire, your benefits should not be impacted by whatever tough choices we are going to have to make.”

Hagel said he would not “play games” and tell service members that the benefits will increase. “They probably aren’t going to increase,” he said. “But you are not going to be hurt.”

Minor adjustments may be required in areas such as Tricare premiums for retired military members, he said. “If we make some adjustments now and we are smart, then we can adjust what we need to adjust and assure that the benefits that you have earned, that we promised, are going to be there,” he said.

Asked by another Marine about Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits, the secretary, who cosponsored the enacting legislation while serving in the Senate, said he will fight to keep it intact.

“It’s the right thing to do for our people...It is a smart investment in our country, a smart investment in you and your families,” he said. “Education cannot be disconnected from security and from the future of our country. So we will do everything we can to protect it.”

Hagel will continue his Southeast Asia trip tomorrow, with stops scheduled in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines.

Biographies:

[Chuck Hagel](#)
